

Halt the Misguided Approach, Enact Transparency & Actualize Sensible Change

"I think you could make a pretty good argument that health care might be dead." - Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-NY)

This is what Democratic Congressman Anthony Weiner said in response to the results in Massachusetts Tuesday night. What happened in Massachusetts does not have to kill health care reform — but it should stop the current misguided approach to reforming our health care system.

For weeks, Democrats have been meeting behind closed doors to hash out a government takeover of health care. The only thing we know about their secret negotiations is that the American people have been denied a seat at the table. President Obama promised a new era of openness and transparency, yet has allowed Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid to preside over the most closed legislative process in our nation's history. Some media reports suggest the President has cut a side deal with union leaders that would protect union benefits while making drastic changes to non-union workers. Because we don't have open and transparent negotiations, we don't know how many deals similar to this one that may be included in a final bill. However, one thing is certain: backroom dealings do not result in better legislation, and the American people are rejecting this method of governance.

As the Democratic Leadership works to merge the Senate and the House versions of health care legislation behind closed doors, I wrote Speaker Pelosi urging her to make the legislation available on the Internet for at least 14 days prior to any vote in the U.S. House of Representatives. I also urged her to include an open dialogue on the health care measure for the public view. The American people have the right to read and review any final health care bill in a time that is reasonable, responsible and fair. In addition, members of Congress and objective health care experts deserve a reasonable amount of time to review this legislation in order to understand the bill's ramifications fully on the current health care system and on our economy before casting votes. I believe these are simple and common sense requests.

Furthermore, I cosponsored a resolution introduced by Congressman Vern Buchanan (R-FL) that would urge public access to health care negotiations. President Obama pledged to the American people to "broadcast[ed]...on C-SPAN so that the American people can see what the choices are." I am proud to support the effort of Congressman Buchanan, and other House Republicans, to ensure openness and transparency is brought into the health care reform debate. Health care legislation will transform one-sixth of our nation's economy and impact the lives of virtually every American. The American people have a right to have their voices heard and deserve to know what their elected leaders are discussing behind closed doors.

All we are asking is that the President honor his commitment to open this process for the American people and let them see firsthand how these decisions are being made and what deals are being cut. This way, perhaps we'll be able to avoid sweetheart deals that no one takes credit for, like the "Cornhusker Kickback" that gives increased Medicaid reimbursements to Nebraska at the expense of all other taxpayers in the nation — all to get a vote in the Senate.

Another deal being hashed out behind closed doors is language that would prevent taxpayer funding from being used to provide abortions. The Senate health care legislation would force taxpayers to pick up the tab for abortions. The abortion

language has been described as "unacceptable" by pro-life Democrat Rep. Bart Stupak (D-MI), and the language is opposed by groups such as the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the National Right to Life Committee.

On January 22, 2010, I will participate in the 37th Annual March for Life with thousands of people from around the country who have come to Washington every year since 1973, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Roe v. Wade*. This year, the March for Life will focus on the existing health care proposal, which has the potential to be just as damaging to pro-life principles as *Roe v. Wade* if taxpayer-subsidized plans end up covering abortion services. If the President and Congressional Democrats won't be transparent, then we will loudly proclaim our right to be heard in the debate on an issue as important as the right to life.

While some Democrats are saying that health care is dead (and I agree that the radical bills that have been introduced thus far have been rebuked by voters), I don't think we have to abandon efforts to craft and enact common-sense changes that will protect patients, expand access and reduce costs through competition. I will continue to stand by the American people in support of an open legislative process and fight to advance our common-sense health care reform proposal that lowers costs, without launching a government takeover.